

Presidential Communications Operations Office

Presidential News Desk

TALK TO THE PEOPLE OF PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE (PART I)

[06 December 2021]

PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE: Good evening my countrymen, mga kababayan ko. Sana sa awa ng Diyos mabuti ang lagay ng sitwasyon ninyo sa pamilya pati sa mga anak lalo na, at ang hinaharap natin na kahirapan sa buhay plus the pandemic that's really bothering us every minute of our life now. I do not want to say it because there is a priest with us but I have always invoked the intervention of God to pull us out of this misery.

Christmas na. I hope that everything will be for the good of everybody and I am very happy that bumababa na talaga, duma-dive na 'yung ano... That's a miracle because other countries are still reeling from the effect parang nagkaroon sila ng problema sa Omicron.

So tayo, we are not hoping for the best but we pray to God that it will not come to our shores. But if ever nagdating na, we can cope up with it just as we did with COVID-19.

Before I proceed, I said I want you to know what I have been doing and saan 'yung pera ng Pilipino napunta. Pinupuntahan ko because these are --- mga multi-million projects na dapat makita ninyo.

I was in Zamboanga together with Secretary Tugade at ipinakita niya 'yung Zamboanga City Seaport Development Project at we also inspected the Zamboanga International Airport Development Project. Puro ito magaganda. Again to the dismay of the Davaoeños na I said na last na lang tayo kasi mahirap kung mauna ang Davao City tapos maiwan 'yang iba.

That is always the price of --- well, delicadeza or just good behavior na tayo kasi ang nandito, the seat of power is here in Davao sometimes, eh sabi ko panghuli na lang tayo. That is the better option for everybody.

But I'd like to show you the improvements that we have made so far. All of the airports in the Philippines today are beautiful. Maski saan ka magpunta, ma-Bicol, it's international airport, contactless. Wala ng ano 'yung i-ano mo lang 'yung number mo doon sa cellphone mo. Hindi man ako marunong mag-operate ng --- I don't know how to do it. Pero maglabas 'yung bagahe mo --- number ng --- tag ng bagahe mo.

It's really very beautiful to realize that at least we have been at par with others now itong panahon ngayon, we are at par with the other airports if not really... Nakita ko 'yung Bicol, Bicol International Airport, inuna ko talaga.

Again that's what --- that is the realization sa aking ano na sinabi ko sa Cabinet member first day pa lang, hatiin 'yung pera for development without considering any political or partisan. So kaya ngayon nakita mo maski saan makita mo 'yung projects.

Now, I'm sure there is a clip there about what we did. Can we have...? Can we show it to the public? Para malaman ng tao, milyon-milyon 'yan so dapat... Kindly play the clip.

[plays video clip]

[Music man lang 'yan.] That's Tugade.

Tugade is the --- I got him in because alam ko ang kapasidad niya. He is the valedictorian of our law class sa San Beda. Iyon ang ginawa niya all over the Philippines.

Iyon para sa mga babae, nursing, para sa mga may anak. May kwarto-kwarto 'yan.

That is Zamboanga pantalan, seaport development.

That's the mayor, Beng Climaco.

[video ends]

Better days ahead because since December 1, we have been on average of 500 to 600 and the number of active cases continues to go down. I'm talking about the COVID.

Sa Davao nga last week there's only one. Very impressive. We continue to see downward trend of the positivity rate, now only less than two percent.

This means that for every 100 persons tested for COVID-19, only a maximum of two people turned out to be positive.

Iyong bakuna nakita naman ninyo, we were able to administer 10.2 million doses throughout the country from November 29 to December 3, which is a huge achievement in our fight against COVID-19. Biro mo... *[applause]*

I'd like to thank the doctors, the volunteers and all for --- of course, Secretary Duque and Secretary Galvez. I thank you for --- in behalf of the Filipino people. *[applause]*

We will have a second round of Bayanihan Bakunahan from December 15 to 17. I hope that we would have the same success. But this time lesser because parang naubos na natin ang Pilipino sa 'yung what counts sa bakuna kaya medyo there's a slowdown of the COVID-19.

We will allow the face-to-face classes in NCR. Now, do not be dismayed kung hindi sa inyo muna because these are all experimental and pilot projects. Doon muna titingnan natin kasi nandoon lahat 'yung resources ng government and 'yung mga official and nandoon at makita kaagad at they can keep posted on what is happening.

Today, December, a total of 28 schools in Metro Manila have started to conduct limited face-to-face classes but under strict health and safety protocols. These include two schools each of the cities of Caloocan, Las Piñas, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Navotas, Parañaque, Pasig, Quezon City, Taguig, Valenzuela; and one school each for the cities of Makati, Malabon, Pasay, and San Juan.

I'm glad that they have thought of this. Just dahan-dahan lang, huwag --- huwag masyadong mabilis kasi --- just the better part of prudence.

The Philippines is expected to be strong economy in ASEAN by 2022, according to Goldman Sachs, a global investment banking firm. Well, that remains to be seen. We still have to worry about the coming Omicron and how it would impact on the population of the Philippines.

But the confidence, at least, is there and the analyst believed that the gross domestic product, GDP, could hit more than seven percent. Sana, sana kung pag-ano --- Inshallah. This will be a good Christmas for everybody.

This will be a long night, Father, if you can bear with us because ang --- dito marami ang requirement ang Cabinet to --- for each of the Cabinet members to make a report. Minsan wala sila, minsan mayroon.

So I'd start at this point with Secretary Galvez will present the accomplishment of the OPAPP. Secretary Galvez, it's your turn to...

**NTF COVID-19 CHIEF IMPLEMENTER AND VACCINE CZAR AND
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER ON THE PEACE PROCESS SECRETARY**

CARLITO GALVEZ JR.: Magandang gabi, mahal na Pangulo; Senator Bong Go; ang ating mahal na ES Salvador Medialdea; mga piling Gabinete.

Masaya kong ibabalita sa inyo ang ating mga nakamit na prosesong pangkapayapaan sa ilalim ng inyong administrasyon. Kasama po sa accomplishment na ito ay ang aming strong collaboration with the DND and the AFP, the DILG and the PNP, and also OPAPP is working under Secretary Lorenzana and Secretary Año pertaining our Security and Justice, Peace and cluster council, and with other --- also with other development agencies.

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Sa inyong pag-upo, Mr. President, inyo pong idineklara na ang inyong administrasyon ay nangangakong ipatupad ang lahat ng signed peace agreements in step with constitutional and legal reforms. Ang presentation po namin ngayon ay ang aming pagtupad sa inyong guidance and inyong directive.

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Kasunod sa direktibang ito, tayo ay bumuo ng Six-Point Peace and Development Agenda na kumakatawan sa mga major peace and development programs na simula noong 2016 ay ating ipinatupad. Ito ay ang Program 1 – 'yung GPH-MILF Peace Process; Program 2 – GPH-MNLF 1996 Final Peace Agreement; Program 3 – Whole-of-Nation Approach or EO 70 NTF-ELCAC Localized Peace Engagement; Program 4 – Closure Agreements with the RPM-P/RPA/ABB, ang Kapatiran and also the CPLA, the Cordillera Party --- Cordillera People's Liberation Army; No. 5 – Social Healing and Peacebuilding; and No. 6 – PAMANA and other socio-economic intervention.

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Ang unang peace agenda, 'yung peace process sa MILF, isa sa priority ng agenda ng administrasyon ang makabuluhang pagpapatupad ng Comprehensive Agreement sa Bangsamoro or CAB.

Isinulong ng inyong administrasyon ang pagratipika ng Bangsamoro Organic Law na nagbigay ng daan sa pagpapatupad ng BARMM at ng Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Tinupad niyo po ang pagpapalawig sa transition period ng Bangsamoro na mahalaga sa implementasyon po ng Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro.

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Sa ilalim naman ng normalization track ay tuloy-tuloy ang pagbabagong buhay ng ating mga rebelde. Naging matagumpay ang decommissioning ng mahigit na 12,000 MILF combatants noong 2019 at kasalukuyan pang isinasagawa ang third phase ng decommissioning ng peace process ang pagde-decommission naman ng additional 14,000 MILF combatants.

Kung makikita niyo po, sir, 'yung lahat ng mga ating mga --- *[Next --- previous slide, please]* --- 'yung ating mga weapons ito po 'yung nakikita niyo po na mga RPG, mga more or less 600 po 'yan. Katumbas po 'yan ng isang tangke, kumbaga sa ano po maano po natin.

So kung makikita po natin talaga ang malalaki na armas, mga machine gun at saka 'yung mortars ay naibaba po natin noong 2019 ng unang yugto ng decommissioning.

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Kasabay nito ay iba pang programa ng normalization tulad nang pagtatag ng Joint Peace and Security Teams na binubuo ng mga miyembro ng Armed Forces of the Philippines, PNP at MILF na dating magkatunggali, ngayon ay nagtutulungan upang mapanatili ang kapayapaan at seguridad ng Bangsamoro.

Sa pag-activate ng National Task Force --- *[next slide, please]* --- for the Disbandment of PAG's, sa pamumuno ni Secretary Año ay patuloy din ang pakikipagtulungan ng pamahalaang nasyonal at mga LGUs ng BARMM upang makontrol ang pagdami ng mga ilegal na armas at ang pagbuwag ng mga pribadong armadong grupo. Labing-anim na grupo na ang nabuwag sa BARMM at Region XII at mayroon po tayong nakuha na more or less 85 firearms at 90 members.

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At bilang pagsuporta ng pamahalaan sa tuloy-tuloy na pagbabagong buhay ng decommissioned combatants ay pinagkalooban sila ng transitional cash assistance na nagkakahalaga ng mahigit na 1.2 billion pesos at mga social assistance packages and social services na nagkakahalaga ng mahigit na 2.5 billion pesos.

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Samantalang habang binubuo ang camp transformation plan kasama ng mga MILF base commanders at community leaders ay nagpapatupad ng iba't ibang proyekto sa mga pilot MILF camps.

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Malinaw na patunay ng tagumpay ng prosesong pangkapayapaan ang transformation ng dating rebelde at kanilang mga komunidad. Sa larawang ito nakikita ang ilan sa mga MILF commanders na ngayon ay nagsisilbi na bilang members ng BTA at nakikilahok sa pagtataguyod ng kapayapaan at kaunlaran ng Bangsamoro.

So kung makikita natin po si Commander Bravo, hindi po ito lumalakad na maraming armas at 100 po ang kanyang escort. Ngayon po ay naka-chaleco na lang po at kasama po ng BTA.

Actually sir, kung makikita natin si Bravo noon dati sir ano 'yan, hindi sila nagkikita ng ka --- ng governor noon ng Lanao del Norte, si Ma'am Imelda, kung makikita niyo po noong dati. Ngayon po magkaibigan na po ulit sila dahil magka --- magkamag-anak pala sila ng kanyang mga magulang, magkakamag-anak po.

Dahil din sa tagumpay sa prosesong pangkapayapaan, mahihikayat ang mga ibang grupo na katulad ng BIFF, Maute --- Maute Group at ASG na sumuko at talikuran ang karahasan. So 'yung panglahat-lahat po na ginagawa ng AFP, PNP at saka OPAPP ay pagka magkaroon po ng mga tinatawag nating mass surrenders.

Isa rin sa pinakamalaking tagumpay na nakamit sa ilalim ng prosesong pangkapayapaan ay ang muling pagkuha ng tiwala at pakikipagtulungan ng Moro National Liberation Front upang ganap nang maisakatuparan ang mga napagkasunduan sa 1996 Final Peace Agreement.

Nagtatag po tayo ng dalawang magkahiwalay na GPH-MNLF Peace Coordinating Committees para sa mga grupo na nasa ilalim ni Chairman Nur

Misuari at Muslimin Sema. Ang mga committees na ito ang siyang magpapalano ng implementasyon ng mga natitirang kasunduan sa ilalim ng Final Peace Agreement sa tulong po ng OIC.

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Bilang tugon sa mga gaps sa implementasyon ng 1996 Final Peace Agreement, kasalukuyang binubuo ang Transformation Program para sa MNLF, magsasagawa ng validation at saka verification at profiling ng MNLF combatants, at ang pagtatag ng security mechanism para sa security component ng MNLF Transformation Program.

Dahil sa nabuong partnership sa MNLF, nakipagtulungan ang grupo ni MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari upang magbigay daan sa ibang mga leaders ng Abu Sayyaf na pumunta na po sa ating matahimik na pamumuhay. Ito ay patunay ng pagsisikap ng gobyerno at ng MNLF na makamit ang kapayapaan na matagal nang mailap sa Sulu.

Tumutulong po ang ating MNLF ano po sa Sulu, Mr. President, na doon po na-release din po 'yung mag-asawang Hyron, British nationals, dahil sa negotiation po ni Chairman Nur Misuari.

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Bilang pagsuporta sa NTF-ELCAC, puspusan ang ating pagsasagawa ng mga localized peace engagement kasama ng DILG as aming co-chair sa LPE cluster sa pamamagitan ng community consultation at local peace dialogues ng mga dating miyembro ng Communist Terrorist Group.

Sa pagtutulongan ng OPAPP at Davao del Norte Provincial Government ay naitayo ang isang peace village sa Talaingod, Davao del Norte para sa 125 na indigenous people families mula sa Haran ang naging biktima ng karahasan dulot ng mga terorista.

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Bilang CORDS sa Region III, ating tinutugunan ang communist insurgency sa pamamagitan ng whole-of-nation approach. Sa pagtutulongan ng iba't ibang ahensiya ay nabuwag po natin ang dalawang larangan ng guerilla doon po sa Central Luzon at idineklara ring persona non grata ng lahat ng LGUs sa Central Luzon ang mga Communist Terrorist Group. Samantalang ang mga supporters ng mga grupong Gabriela, Kadamay, Farmers' Group ay tumalikod na rin po sa Communist Terrorist Group.

Patuloy naman ang ating suporta upang maprotektahan ang mga kabataan laban sa recruitment, pagbibigay ng tulong pinansiyal sa mga former rebels at pakikipag-ugnayan sa iba't ibang sektor upang matugunan ang kanilang pangangailangan.

On Program 4 sa RPA/ABB Peace Process ito po 'yung Alex Boncayao Brigade. Matapos ang limang --- 19 na taon mula mapirmahan ang 2000 Memorandum of Agreement, nilagdaan sa ilalim ng Duterte administration ang Clarificatory Implementing Document o CID sa pagitan ng national government at Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade.

Sir, ito po kung matatandaan niyo po, na ito po 'yung nakausap niyo po na babae na asawa po ni Mr. Tabara na sila po ay nag --- na humihingi ng ano, ng katuparan po sa 19 years na napag-ano po natin. At 'yun po nakita natin mula noong nag-usap po kayo, nagkaroon na po tayo ng mga proseso na para po sa kanila.

Sa pamamagitan ng 3-Year Normalization Program para sa RPA na ngayon ay tinatawag ng Kapatiran, ang mga 727 miyembro ay nagdaan sa decommissioning process. Sa ilalim ng programa, sila ay nabigyan ng tulong na pangkabuhayan, health insurance, at iba-ibang mga pagsasanay. Karamihan na rin po dito sa kanila ay enlisted na po sa AFP, at iba po ay kasapi na po sa CAFGU, at the same time 'yung mga iba po nasa forest guards na po.

Mahal na Pangulo, katulad nang ginawa para sa Kapatiran, tayo ay nagpatupad din ng isang 5-Year Normalization Program para sa mga miyembro ng Cordillera Bodong Administration – Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CBA-CPLA). Kasama dito ang pag-decommission ng 1,558 members ng CPLA at ang pagsira ng 339 na mga baril na naisu --- nai-surrender.

Layunin ng programang ito na pataasin ang antas ng kabuhayan ng mga miyembro ng CBA-CPLA sa pamamagitan nang pagkakaloob ng social protection packages, trabaho, at kabuhayan. Nagsagawa rin ng mga programang para sa kababaihan at kabataang miyembro ng CPLA at patuloy sa pagsulong ng tunay na awtonomiya ng Cordillera.

Mayroon din po na 15 officers, 670 enlisted personnel, and CAFGUs na na-endorse doon sa AFP at naka --- naka-integrate na po sa ating Armed Forces, at mayroon po tayong 508 members na employed sa Bantay Gubat doon po sa DENR.

[Next slide, please.]

On Program 5, on SHAPE Program, Mr. President, layunin naman ng Social Healing and Peacebuilding o SHAPE Program ng OPAPP ang pagtataguyod ng kultura ng kapayapaan, sugpuin ang violent extremism at pagsuporta sa rehabilitasyon ng Marawi. Nakatuon ang SHAPE sa mga vulnerable groups katulad ng kababaihan, kabataan, at indigenous people sa pamamagitan ng pag-mainstream sa National Action Plan on women, peace and security, pagbuo ng National Action Plan on Youth Peace and Security, at pagsasagawa ng peacebuilding project naaayon sa Human Fraternity Document na nilagdaan ng Santo Papa at ng Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, al-Ahmed al-Tayeb ng Cairo.

At sa pamamagitan naman ng PAMANA Program, napagkalooban natin ang iba't ibang socio-economic services na nagkakahalaga ng mahigit na 55.1 billion sa komunidad na apektado ng armadong kaguluhan, katulad ng farm-to-market road, water system and livelihood --- and livelihood projects.

So ito po makikita niyo po sir si Ma'am Angel, 'yung kasama ko pong naga-ano ng isang road project sa Agusan del Norte. Sa kabuuan, mahigit na 2,400 community-driven development projects at 1,300 sustainable livelihood projects ang nais --- ang naipatupad ng PAMANA Program.

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Kasama dito ang mga proyekto na katulad ng farm-to-market roads, agriculture, infrastructure, water projects, livelihood assistance, at iba pa. Mr. President, sa tulong ng PAMANA ay nakapagbigay tayo ng ginhawa sa karagdagang oportunidad sa mga residente ng beneficiary communities. Isa po dito po 'yung ating tinatawag na ating 156 road project, which is 144 completed with 287 kilometers already completed, including 12 bridges with 257 meters wide and long.

[Next slide.]

Nakikiisa ang OPAPP sa pagtataguyod ng isang pamunuang maaasahan at may pananagutan, mga prinsipyong isinulong ng administrasyong Duterte. Mr. President, nagsagawa tayo nang masusing imbestigasyon sa OPAPP at siniguro ang agarang aksyon laban sa ating mga opisyal at empleyadong nasangkot sa mga maanomalyang gawain.

Bunga nang pagpapabuti ng OPAPP against corruption, ginawaran ito ng --- ng Commission on Audit ng "unqualified opinion" dahil sa maayos na presentasyon ng aming mga financial statement. Ito po 'yung pinaka-highest

na qualification na ibinibigay po ng COA.

Dahil dito, nakakuha kami ng gradong 95 percent at nagawaran bilang isa sa mga Most Outstanding Accounting Office Award ng Association of Government Accountants of the Philippines Corp. ngayong taon. Nabigyan din ang OPAPP ng Performance Governance System initiated status with a Gold Trailblazer Award ng Institute for Solidarity in Asia dahil sa naipakitang kapasidad na i-operationalize ang public governance system.

[Next slide, please.]

Mr. President, upang mas lalong mapabuti ang aming serbisyo, kasalukuyang nagdaraan ito sa Performance Governance System Compliance Stage gayundin ang Quality Management System or ISO certification.

Nagpapatupad ang Information System Strategic Plan 2019-2023 sa --- na aprubado ng MITHI at ipinagbubuti ng aming business policies, protocols and processes based on the directive on ARTA --- on Against Red-Tape.

Ang lahat ng ito ay sa paghahanda ng transformation ng OPAPP para maging Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity sa pamamagitan ng proposed Executive Order on PAPRU.

[Next slide, please.]

Bilang tugon sa programa ng pamahalaan laban sa COVID-19, kabilang ang OPAPP na tumutulong sa National Task Force Against COVID-19 at National COVID-19 Vaccination Program.

Mr. President, in a nutshell, your leadership has inspired us and enabled us to achieve these milestones. Since 2017, the country's peace process helped establish a stability in domestic peace and order situation.

Despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, the peace process in the country continues to be implemented. The implementation of the peace agreement is transforming former combatants and their families into peaceful and productive individuals, and conflict-affected communities to peaceful, developed and resilient communities.

And the Duterte administration established a strong foundation in the implementation of the signed peace agreement for the next administration to build upon and sustain the gains of peace, particularly in Mindanao.

Mahal na Pangulo, nangangako po ang OPAPP na patuloy nitong itataguyod

ang kapayapaan, pag-uunawaan at pagkakaisa. Sisiguraduhin namin po ang lahat na nakapaloob na kasunduang pangkapayapaan ay maisasakatuparan.

And rest assured, Mr. President, 'yung challenges po kanina ay iso-solve din po natin 'yun because pupunta po ako bukas sa Cotabato ng dalawang araw at aayusin natin 'yung ground para maging matahimik po ang eleksiyon sa susunod na eleksiyon next year.

So that's my commitment, Mr. President, that I will do my best at iso-solve namin po ang problema sa ground, with the help of Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Secretary Año.

Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Thank you. Salamat, Secretary Galvez. Let me introduce you to Fr. Austriaco. Father si Secretary Galvez was the commander doon sa Marawi. Right after the Marawi siege, I got him in into the Cabinet, he's one of the many military members. Here with us is Secretary Lorenzana who's the DND and the DILG si Secretary Año, all excellent government workers and true gentlemen.

Out of respect for the --- for the time of Fr. Austriaco, unahin ka na lang namin, Father, kasi matagal 'to because every Cabinet member is going to -- - we don't want to detain you more than the necessary talkatise na ano. Mahaba kasi kung iba, malayo ka pa. Unahin ka na namin.

So we will listen to you, the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 because that has been the scare of the nation until now. Father, kindly educate us about the Omicron variant and --- so that we would know.

FR. NICANOR AUSTRIACO: Thank you po, Mr. President, and I'm a Filipino Catholic priest-scientist and I'm speaking to you from the United States.

So this evening I've been asked to brief you po on the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 and I would like to highlight some of the most recent clinical data that we have obtained from South Africa.

[So the next slide, please.]

I would like to begin by just giving you a perspective on the current assessment on the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. I'm a molecular biologist, so I would like to give you a sense of my perception of the pandemic.

[Next slide, please.]

As you pointed out at the beginning of the Cabinet meeting, we are experiencing the lowest case numbers in 20 months, with an average of about 500 cases per day. I would like to contrast that with here in the United States. Yesterday we had 120,000 new cases and the United States is only three times the size of the Philippines.

[Next slide, please.]

What is also striking is that these are --- we are also experiencing the lowest hospitalization numbers in 20 months. Earlier today, Makati Med announced for the first time during the pandemic, they have no COVID-19 patients in their hospital. And this is typical of many hospitals throughout our beloved country.

[Next slide, please.]

But this is also interesting because we are experiencing the highest mobility in 20 months. So this is a graph from Apple Mobility, and the higher the curves, the more people are moving around. And what you can see this is the mobility trends from the NCR. What you can see is that --- most --- many of our people are moving around now, the most in 20 months since the beginning of the pandemic and the lockdown in March of 2020.

[Next slide, please.]

And so as a biologist, this is the question: we are currently with Delta, the most infectious variant in the past 20 months, the highest mobility levels in the past 20 months, more and more of our kababayans are moving around, and yet we are experiencing the lowest levels of cases and hospitalizations in 20 months.

And so what these three mean together is that it suggests that we have attained substantial population immunity from natural infections and vaccinations in the urban areas of the Philippines because the pandemic has raged and spread primarily in our cities and in our first class municipalities. And so the fact that the virus is struggling to find new Filipinos to infect, suggests that we have attained substantial population immunity.

[Next slide, please.]

This is to compare the Philippines with three of our ASEAN neighbors. So if

you look, the lowest graph is the Philippines and we are at 500 cases per day. You can see Thailand and Malaysia had the Delta surge earlier than we did, but their --- their surge has not been able to crash. So at this time, Thailand and Malaysia are still experiencing 5,000 cases per day.

Now contrast that with Vietnam. Vietnam also had a Delta peak. Unfortunately, the Delta peak has resurged and Vietnam is still experiencing significant numbers of COVID-19, 15,000 or so per day.

Now the reason why these four different countries have experienced different pandemic curves is probably because as you can see the Philippines experienced --- unlike these three other countries --- substantial waves of previous variants. So the --- especially the Alpha, Beta variant, which struck our beloved country in March and April of this year.

And so combining the vaccinations and the natural immunity, what you are seeing here is that many of our cities where the pandemic tends to focus are now --- are now stable enough to prevent transmission.

[Next slide, please.]

I just wanted to highlight this graph from the Financial Times, which illustrates the population immunity in different countries in Europe. On the left-hand side, you have Spain, which has about 90 percent of eligible population vaccinated. And the NCR and many of our urban cities have very similar vaccination levels.

And what you can see on the left-hand side, if you focus on the red curve, the red curve is the number of deaths. And what you can see is that the higher the population that is protected, the smaller the red curve. And across Europe, what you will notice is as the vaccination levels drop, the red curve begins to explode because the current wave that is flowing through Europe which is Delta-driven is still quite significant.

At this time, given our significantly high numbers of vaccination, not only in the NCR but in many of our cities. Secretary Vince just sent me the numbers for our cities and our first class municipalities, and many of them are quite significant, above 70 percent for the first dose at least. What we are seeing here is that at least the NCR, with nearly a hundred percent protection of the adults and with the increasing numbers of our teenagers, is probably going to be robustly protected against the future surge.

[Next slide, please.]

We will now move to the COVID-19 Omicron threat to the Philippines and I would like to begin as a biologist just to explain what Omicron is.

[Next slide, please.]

Here, you see the best animation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. And on the surface of the virus, you see about 25 spike proteins. And these spike proteins are important because the virus uses the spike protein as a key to enter the cells of our body.

[Next slide, please.]

So for the duration of the pandemic, we had four important variants of concern: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta. Notice that we experienced Alpha, Beta, and Delta surges in the Philippines but not really a significant Gamma surge.

[Next slide, please.]

We now have Omicron, and this is the --- so this makes the 5th of the important variants of concern, and the most significant change is that this virus --- this version of the virus has 50+ mutations.

[Next slide, please.]

Let me explain. So different variants have different spike proteins. It is the same COVID-19 virus, it's the same SARS-CoV-2 virus. But different variants have different spike proteins.

[Next slide, please.]

And what you can see here is that comparison of the spike protein on the left of the Delta variant and the spike protein on the right of Omicron. Red indicates change, and as you can see there are a few red spots in Delta. But on the right, with Omicron, there is significant red, which means that the shape of the spike protein is different.

And the reason that this is important po is because the antibodies in our blood recognize the shape of the spike protein. And so, if the shape changes dramatically, this could mean the trans --- that the virus is able to escape the immune protection that we have either from a previous infection of COVID-19 or from vaccination.

[Next slide, please.]

So, what I would like to go over now is the clinical data that is coming out of South Africa. So, this is the first graph from December 2nd, so it's only four days ago. And what you see on the left-hand side is the daily cases comparing the Omicron wave with the previous waves that were experienced in South Africa.

So the South Africa had a Delta wave, a Beta wave, and the first Wuhan wave, very similar to the Philippines. And what you can see that is most striking is that the red line is very sharp and it's going up very quickly, which suggests that the Omicron wave is exploding in a way that is faster than the Delta or the Beta waves that we experienced in the past.

The middle graph shows you the positivity rate. And again, what you are seeing here is the Omicron variant is exploding in South Africa. But what is most important is on the right. On the right, you see the hospitalizations in South Africa. And what you see is despite the accelerating numbers of cases of Omicron, the hospitalizations are on track. They are not rising faster, very similar to the other waves of the variants in South Africa.

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This is the preliminary data that was published on Saturday. What we are looking at here now is the relative risk... So, on this graph, if you are a 100% --- if the red line was 100%, then the risk is comparable between an unvaccinated and a vaccinated Filipino.

What you can see is that the Delta wave had a 9 percent relative risk and we can see that the Omicron wave is three times higher than the Delta wave. So it is true that the preliminary data coming from South Africa suggests that the Omicron variant is more transmissible amongst vaccinated individuals.

[Next slide, please.]

But it is really important to focus on hospitalizations. So if you look at the hospitalizations... This is a screen grab from a presentation from the Department of Health in South Africa, from the province of Gauteng, which is the hotspot for the Omicron explosion that is currently taking place.

What you can see is that the preliminary data suggests that 10 times more unvaccinated individuals are being hospitalized as compared to vaccinated individuals. This is incredibly hopeful especially since as I highlighted before, because of the NCR Plus 8 strategy, our cities and first class municipalities,

which is the target for Omicron when it arrives in the Philippines, are highly vaccinated.

[Next slide, please.]

This is data from the Tshwane District, South Africa from three days ago po. So this is the most recent data that we can get on the Omicron.

[Next slide, please.]

What you can see from a few days ago is that this district in South Africa is experiencing a dramatic surge of COVID-19. They are experiencing 3,000 cases per day on the 3rd of December. On the right, you see that many of the hospitalizations are still --- are of people 50 years and below.

[Next slide, please.]

Despite the number of COVID-19 positives, however, the Omicron hospitalizations are quite low. So you have only something to the effect of 42 to 29 hospitalizations despite the thousands of individuals who are testing positive for COVID-19.

[Next slide, please.]

What is important is that if you look at the numbers of the people who were hospitalized, what is so amazing about the Omicron is that only --- is that 70 percent of them do not need oxygen po. And this is very different from the Delta experience that we experienced throughout the world and in the last few months in the Philippines. So, we have 31 percent require oxygen; 70 percent do not require oxygen.

[Next slide, please.]

And what is striking is that 10 of the 11 people who needed oxygen were unvaccinated. And again, what this suggests is that if you are vaccinated, this will protect you against severe disease and hospitalizations even with Omicron, which is good news for us.

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So there are three important questions that the scientists of the world are waiting for: Is the Omicron variant more transmissible? It is likely po that it is more transmissible. Is the Omicron variant more immune evasive? Probably po. The initial data seems to look like that. Is the Omicron variant more deadly? And this is the good news po, it's probably less deadly than Delta.

I have to point out po that this is preliminary data and we are waiting for data from the older populations in the global north because there are not many lolos and lolas in South Africa. And so most of the patients that we are seeing in the hospitals of South Africa are relatively young.

We still do not know po what will happen when it --- when Omicron begins to spread in the northern part of the world where more of the population are older. I also have to point out that hospitalizations are lagging indicator. It usually takes a week or two weeks after a surge to see the hospitalizations. But the data from South Africa is very hopeful, especially since they have already been dealing with the surge for at least a week or two and the hospitalizations do not seem to be dramatically increasing po.

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Based on this, I would like to suggest the following for preparations for the arrival of the Omicron variant in the Philippines. First, there is no need to panic. We --- let us celebrate Pasko. This is the best time in 20 months for the entire country.

You know, I am so proud to be a Filipino because I boast of this. Here in the United States, I say we have 500 cases po yesterday compared to 120,000. The positivity rate is less than two percent. This is some of the best numbers in the world.

And so this is not the time to panic. It is the time to be careful. We have to prepare. But we also have to celebrate especially since this is Christmas. We must prepare the hospital infrastructure and increase healthcare workers

staffing capacity po. Because in the Alpha and Delta surges it was clear that we had nursing shortages, especially in the NCR.

We have to continue to vaccinate and to boost our kababayans to build and maintain population immunity. This is really important po because the experience of Israel and other countries that vaccinated early showed that it is important to boost at the appropriate time to maintain population immunity.

We must increase the population immunity around our international gateways. Omicron will enter through an airport most likely. And so what we have to do is we have to build a wall of vaccinated Filipinos around these airports. Because once Omicron arrives, it will try to spread into the Filipino population. And if the Filipinos around the airports po --- and this was the rationale strategy for the NCR Plus 8 --- are heavily vaccinated, then it doesn't matter if there is an OFW who returns home. Because even if this person is able to enter the community, the virus will struggle.

My university po in the United States has a 98 percent vaccination coverage in our staff and our students. And every time a student goes out and gets a COVID-19 when he returns, no one else gets sick po. The --- and we are dealing with Delta. It is struggling because of the high numbers of vaccination. The population is protected. However, I --- for our kababayans who are watching me, I must urge you to get vaccinated because Omicron, when it arrives in the Philippines, will find every unvaccinated Filipino. And you will get sick, and even though it is mild, it is still, it is still COVID-19. And we do not want to put ourselves and our beloved family members, especially our lolos and lolas into --- we do not want to risk them, to risk their lives and their well-being and their livelihood, especially at this time.

I would like to end my presentation po with a short discussion of the antiviral drugs. God ble --- *[ah next slide, please.]*

The importance po of emphasizing the antiviral drugs is that they are equally effective against all variants of SARS-CoV-2. One of the things is that, you know, the vaccines depend upon the variants. But the antiviral drugs are equally effective.

[Next slide, please.]

And the reason for this po is that these drugs work on the virus, they kill the virus once the virus enters the human cells. And so, the outside of the virus will change with the different variants but the inside po will not change.

And so Pfizer's paxlovid, Merck's molnupiravir will be effective. *[Next slide, please.]* And this is the most recent data on the antivirals that's coming out of Merck and Pfizer. I know that Merck's molnupiravir has already been authorized for compassionate use in the Philippines. And I thank Secretary Duque and the DOH for that.

What you are seeing here po is that when in clinical trials with high-risk patients --- lolos, lolas with underlying comorbidities --- the Merck antiviral was able to prevent 30 percent of the high-risk patients from entering the hospital.

But look po at Pfizer, 90 percent protection for high- risk patients from entering the hospitals. In comparing deaths... So both of these drugs were able to prevent deaths as compared to non-drugs which had nine for molnupiravir and seven for paxlovid.

And what this means po is that if a Filipino gets COVID and is at high risk, what we would have to do if we have these drugs is we have to give this Filipino, our kababayan, 10 pills. Two every day for five days po. That is all that is needed, and we will be able to prevent him from entering the hospital. He will be sick at home but it will be mild. He will not be hospitalized.

Now, the cost here in the United States is \$700 for the entire 10 dose --- 10 doses and paxlovid, [\$]500. But I know that Merck has already opened its license for the manufacturing of generic versions and I know that the Philippines will have access to this. So...

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This is um... So the way out of this pandemic is through vaccinations which we are doing now po. And we must continue to do that to maintain our immunity, especially with the Omicron threat. And we now have to also focus our efforts on procuring antiviral drugs.

This combination po will transform pandemic COVID-19 into endemic COVID-19, where we will be able to reopen completely our societies, and where COVID-19 will become a regular flu.

And so I thank you po for your service to our beloved country. *[Next slide, please.]* I always end with one more slide to Our Lady. Thank you so much and God bless you po. *[applause]*

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Father, salamat. You give us hope and that we --- it's not scary after all --- not that scary. Hearing from you was really very educational thing for the Filipino. So I would like to ask you one question, Father. Are you based here in the Philippines?

FR. AUSTRIACO: Ah, po? I have a joint appointment po. So I spend August to December here in the United States, and in 10 days po I will return home to Manila.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: You stay here permanently, Father?

FR. AUSTRIACO: For six months po. Six months. So I go six months in the US and six months in the Philippines po. And I go back and forth. And I have two laboratories po, one here in the United States and one at the University of Sto. Tomas. And my students and I are working on a vaccine for the Philippines.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Wow. That's great. I hope you'd succeed --- I hope and pray really that you'd be able to help us.

FR. AUSTRIACO: We must pray po.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Pero ang mas mabuti, Father, kung dito ka na lang. Hayaan mo na lang 'yang Amerika. *[laughter]*

FR. AUSTRIACO: I will...

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Mas marami na...

FR. AUSTRIACO: ... talk to my superiors po.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Oo. Well, it's --- it's not, but --- well, kami mas gusto namin nandito ka na lang kasi... *[laughter]* Are you still a Filipino citizen?

FR. AUSTRIACO: I am po and I will die a Filipino. *[applause]*

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Ah okay. Okay. So we will expect a change of schedule next --- next year, maybe. *[laughter]*

Salamat at maraming salamat sa iyo, Fr. Austriaco. Maraming salamat po. You have been a great help to us and God bless you and the Lady.

FR. AUSTRIACO: God bless you po and the Philippines.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: But think about it. Stay longer here.

FR. AUSTRIACO: I will po.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Nandito ba 'yung family mo? 'Yung father, mother?

FR. AUSTRIACO: My mother lives in Las Piñas po.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Ah.

FR. AUSTRIACO: ...in Manila. And I ser --- I am currently serving as a Balik Scientist po from the Department of Science and Technology. Because I would like to build up --- I was trained MIT here in the United States po and I would like to bring back my education to the Philippines.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: We would be happy --- I would be happy to appoint you as the Secretary of Health. *[laughter]* If that is okay with you. *[applause]*

FR. AUSTRIACO: No po. No po. Secretary Duque is doing a fine job po and he's a Thomasian po.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: He has --- he has shown --- he vents a desire really to rest, you know, after all this ruckus against him. Sabi ko I've been forcing him to stay but he would be happy to give way to you, I'm sure. *[laughter]*

DOH SECRETARY FRANCISCO DUQUE III: Yes, Mr. President, to another Thomasian. *[laughter]*

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Salamat, Father, thank you.

FR. AUSTRIACO: Salamat po. *[applause]*

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: In behalf of the family, our gratitude to you.

SEC. GALVEZ: Mr. President?

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Yes, Secretary, you have a question to Father?

SEC. GALVEZ: Sir, actually sir, Father Austriaco is helping us all throughout even though nasa States siya. He is with us every Monday talking about COVID-19. And also he helped Quezon City, sir, on the vaccination.

In fact, he is the one communicating with the ano, with the priests and also with the religious to use the ano, the vaccination site, 'yung mga churches. So 'yung churches natin more or less mga 187 na churches ang in-open natin, sir, sa vaccination during the campaign, and Father Austriaco is very, very instrumental on that, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: That's an added accolade for you, Father. So we would be blessed if you decide to accept the portfolio of Secretary of Justice, short stint. *[laughter]* I am sure Secretary Duque would only be too happy to give way.

SENATOR CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE "BONG" GO: Mr. President, puwedeng sumingit? Father, baka puwede mong ---

FR. AUSTRIACO: Yes po?

SEN. GO: --- ipagdasal ang ating bansa? Can you say a ---

FR. AUSTRIACO: Everyday po.

SEN. GO: Can you say a short ---

FR. AUSTRIACO: Everyday po.

SEN. GO: Can you say a short prayer?

FR. AUSTRIACO: I say masses for the Philippines po.

SEN. GO: Salamat po, Father.

FR. AUSTRIACO: Everyday.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: It goes without saying actually.

SEN. GO: Right now. Kung puwede po ngayon, Father. Short prayer po para sa...

FR. AUSTRIACO: Right now po?

SEN. GO: Opo.

FR. AUSTRIACO: Okay, let us pray. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Heavenly Father, we ask your blessings on our beloved country. We ask your blessings on our government leaders, for all our healthcare workers, for all our frontliners, for all who take a risk in service of our kababayans. We pray for your continued protection on all of us, especially during this ongoing pandemic. We ask for your power, we ask for your mercy, we ask for your peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

PRESIDENT DUTERTE: Thank you, Father. [*applause*]

FR. AUSTRIACO: You're welcome po.

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